

# **Participating in learning post-16: effective practice in schools**

***A report of a small-scale study of effective practice in early identification of and preventative work with young people in order to ensure their participation in education or training post-16***

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*Everything I do for these young people as a Head of Year is about their futures. (Head of Year 8)*

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## A. Introduction

The Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to raise the age of compulsory participation in education or training to the end of the academic year in which young people turn 17 in 2013 and to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2015, helping to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications that enable them to progress to higher education, work and adult life. The vast majority of 16-17 year olds already participate in post-16 education or training, but there is a significant minority, often the most vulnerable, who do not. Evidence shows that the root of their disengagement often exists long before the age of 16.

This is the report of a small scale study, conducted by the DfE Effective Practice Team, based on evidence drawn from visits to 14 secondary schools, comprising one 11-14 school, five 11-16 schools, seven 11-18 schools and one 11-19 special school. All of the schools were drawn from local authorities that had made offers of education and training to a higher than regional average proportion of 16 year-olds (2010 September Guarantee) and had a higher than regional average proportion of 16 year-olds in learning (2010 Activity Survey). This was despite, the proportion of 16 year-olds attaining 5A\*-C GCSE including English and mathematics being below or no more than 5% above the England average in 2010<sup>1</sup>. A number of the schools visited served areas of high deprivation and all had been recommended by their local authorities as having effective practice in securing post-16 participation for their pupils.

The report aims to capture effective practice in the schools visited in order to inform other schools as they prepare for the publication of key stage 4 and key stage 5 destination measures from 2012 and the raising of the participation age (RPA) in 2013. Initially, some underpinning practice is identified and this is followed by nine key approaches commonly displayed by the schools. Each key approach is presented with examples and vignettes from individual schools. A self evaluation tool for schools wishing to evaluate their own practice is provided at Annex 1. The methodology used and a list of the schools visited are included at Annex 2.

## B. Underpinning practice

Engagement and inclusion were fundamental principles for these schools and raising participation generally had been a longstanding commitment. Although few of the schools visited had made specific preparations for the raising of the participation age (RPA), their dedication to securing post-16 participation in learning for their pupils meant that RPA formed a logical extension of this work.

All of the schools visited had high expectations for their pupils and raising aspirations was a key priority; it was not unusual for schools to expect all of their pupils to progress to some form of further education or training post-16. Many of the schools visited chose to have discussions with pupils about their post-16 destinations as early as Year 8; typically, a number of senior key postholders with responsibilities in areas

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<sup>1</sup> Since we already know that attainment is the biggest driver of post-16 participation, the intention in this study was to look at what else schools can do to encourage post-16 participation, in addition to promoting high attainment.

such as transition, curriculum, inclusion and behaviour worked collectively to ensure that no pupil left school without a planned and appropriate destination. Post-16 participation was integrated into the schools' overall approach to increasing engagement and raising standards.

A striking feature of the schools was the lengths they would go to in order to prevent a pupil from failing; the ethos was one of inclusion. Rather, the schools saw it as their responsibility to make adjustments to provision in order to meet the specific needs of the young person. Personalised, bespoke provision was made for individual pupils, and schools were clear that they would do whatever it took to ensure that their young people were able to engage with education or training. In many ways, these schools were doing what good schools do; what made them distinctive was the thorough, systemic and cohesive nature of their approach. Furthermore, by establishing trusting relationships with pupils and parents, they ensured that all pupils, even the most vulnerable, were able to become active participants in their learning.

Careers guidance was robust and well planned, starting early where appropriate, and with planned progression through to post-16. Several schools had created opportunities for more informal guidance through a vertical tutoring arrangement whereby older pupils played a significant part in raising the aspirations of younger pupils. For example in one school, Year 10 pupils who had successfully re-engaged with their learning acted as mentors to younger pupils; in another school, older students undertook lunchtime duties alongside teachers. Such examples, where schools secure support based on the needs and circumstances of their pupils, underpin the Government's approach to careers guidance.

As pupils move through key stage 4, access to the right support to help them think through post-16 options becomes increasingly important. The Education Act 2011, introduces a new duty on schools to secure access to impartial and independent careers guidance for every pupil in Years 9 to 11. Statutory guidance will be issued to focus schools on the most important issues they need to consider in pursuance of the new duty including the importance of working with quality assured external providers and the need to secure access to face-to-face guidance for pupils where it is the most appropriate form of support. . Examples of good practice will be identified and shared widely to underpin the statutory guidance.

*Everyone is perceived as a successful learner as soon as they walk through the door. (Deputy Headteacher)*

*We have real 'can do' attitude and a sincere belief that our students can and will achieve beyond their expected potential. (Headteacher)*

*Sometimes we need to do something radically different to engage these pupils. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*We get asked all the time about what we want to do when we leave – all the time – they give us lots of information too. (Year 9 pupil)*

## C. Pen portrait of the pupils interviewed

Most of the pupils interviewed were in Years 8 and 9 in summer 2011 - the first cohort to benefit from RPA – although some schools also included older pupils in the discussions. Schools were asked to select pupils who had been at risk of disengagement but for whom early intervention had proved successful. Some of the pupils were accompanied by their parents.

Whilst not wishing in any way to stereotype this group of pupils, a number of those interviewed in the 14 schools visited tended to share some of the following characteristics:

- They lacked confidence and had low self esteem. However, a striking feature was their ability to reflect openly and honestly on their particular needs and their recognition of the way in which the school had helped them.
- Many had joined secondary school with lower than average levels of literacy and numeracy. Some had a previously undiagnosed learning difficulty; in some cases, parents had struggled for this to be recognised and addressed for a number of years.
- In some cases, there was a history of unemployment and low aspirations at home; poor attendance and/or an element of disrupted schooling were not uncommon.
- They found large classes stressful and tended to prefer small group or one-to-one support from adults who took an interest in them and listened to them.
- They expressed a preference for active, practical, hands-on learning.

*My behaviour is quite different now. I listen to the teachers more and I don't argue with other pupils. (Year 9 pupil)*

*I don't like lessons where I have to sit in one place and I can't talk. I like to move around and work in a group. (Year 9 pupil)*

*I wasn't bothered to come to school in Year 8. The lessons irritated me – I wasn't doing things I was interested in. (Year 9 pupil)*

*I know that I can just stop and have some time out when things get a bit hard...then I just go back to my work. (Year 8 pupil)*

*The school council has given me a role at school. I feel more part of the school. (Year 8 pupil)*

*I realise that school is actually important. School gave me a second chance. (Year 9 pupil)*

## D. How successful schools prevent pupils from becoming disengaged from education: nine key approaches

The schools visited adopted a wide range of approaches and interventions in order to both identify pupils at risk of disengagement and to prevent that disengagement from taking hold. At times, the schools also had to re-engage pupils, particularly when disengagement was longstanding and pupils had transferred from other schools and settings.

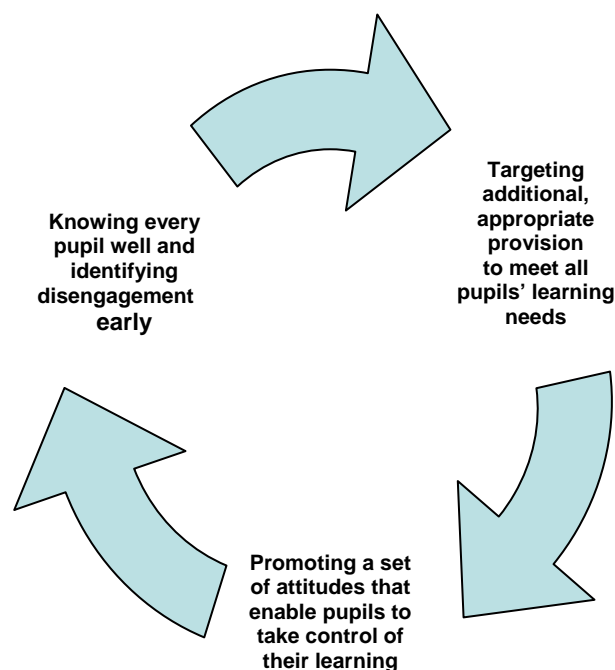
*Some groups are more vulnerable than others but any pupil can become disengaged. It's a combination of factors that can be triggered at any time. (Senior Leader)*

*We take a very individualised approach, targeting support to match the needs of each pupil. What works for one pupil doesn't work for another. (Year Leader)*

*If it's not working for these pupils, we have to look at what we can do differently so we can engage them. (English teacher)*

*Our children are very diverse so we do a combination of things as their needs are different. (Principal)*

Whilst the approaches used were diverse and imaginative, there was a good degree of commonality across the schools and similar approaches were found in the majority of the schools visited. The nine approaches identified can be clustered in the following way to illustrate the cyclical nature of the schools' practice:



## 1. Use a range of intelligence to ensure that every pupil is well known

*We know the children well. We challenge them to want to do better and we will tailor programmes to meet their needs. It makes them feel special. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*The system rewards the children who always behave but it also alerts us to any sudden fluctuations and patterns over time. (Deputy Headteacher)*

*The data now ensures that we can have meaningful conversations. All staff can access the same information – it is very powerful. (Headteacher)*

*Whatever we do, it has to be intelligence-based. Then we get the people round the table and talk. Whatever the issue, we must respond. The child must have a hearing. (Assistant Headteacher)*

The schools had an impressive in-depth knowledge of all of their pupils, including their personal interests, strengths and talents. They had gathered this intelligence in imaginative ways, including pupil census data, 1-1 interviews and through strong student voice mechanisms.

Schools collected and analysed a range of data to build a detailed picture of every child. Examples included:

- punctuality and attendance data
- behaviour referrals
- rewards system data
- progress and attainment data
- concerns raised by teachers, parents and support staff
- pupil self referrals

They shared data and used it intelligently, typically cutting it in different ways to analyse pupil cohorts and to identify vulnerable groups so that appropriate actions could be taken. Schools mapped provision carefully so that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, had a clear record of their needs and provision, typically stored on a secure database which all staff could access. It must be emphasised that much of the above data is already collected by the majority of schools and these practices should not present an additional burden on staff.

All of the schools visited had strong pastoral support structures in place. Typically, non-teaching 'learning managers' or 'pastoral year managers' worked alongside each year leader. As non-teaching personnel, they were readily available to pupils throughout the day and were able to respond rapidly to parental or pupil concerns. It went without saying that pastoral care and academic progress were regarded as inextricably linked.

The senior leadership team at **Dinnington Comprehensive School** in Rotherham has undertaken an in-depth analysis of their Year 11 cohort to identify the characteristics of pupils deemed vulnerable to disengagement with education. Their analysis revealed the following characteristics shared by this group of pupils:

- Their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 was below Level 4 in both English and mathematics and their writing was typically weaker than their reading;
- Their attendance was below 90% in Key Stage 3;
- They had low self-esteem and lacked confidence;
- They experienced difficulty forming relationships with peers and often with their families also;
- They were reluctant to participate in PE; and
- There was a history of unemployment within the family.

These findings have been shared with all of the schools across the learning partnership, including the partner primary schools. As a result, the learning partnership has focused on improving writing and the senior leadership team at Dinnington ensures that the learning from the research informs curriculum planning and provision across the school.

**Castle Rock High School** in Leicestershire has introduced a 'medal system' as an incentive scheme for its pupils. All pupils start with a gold medal but if they collect any negative entries for behaviour, punctuality, uniform or equipment they move to a silver medal. Further negative entries can lead to a bronze medal or 'trainee' status. The medals are reviewed every seven weeks and all pupils move back to gold at the start of each new period. There is an annual reward for pupils who retain the gold medal all year. The system ensures that any issues are picked up quickly by staff and changes in behaviour can be monitored. The system has been a resounding success, providing additional pupil data; furthermore, it is motivating more students to retain their gold medal all year.

Pastoral year managers at **Redcar Community College** in Redcar and Cleveland are non-teaching staff who are co-located and able to respond rapidly to pupil or parental concerns. They are also perceived as 'advocates' by pupils. They have developed a set of early indicators based on a range of intelligence such as behaviour logs, punctuality and attendance data, concerns raised by parents, pupils, subject teachers or form tutors. As a result, the school is able to keep a database of vulnerable pupils, mapping the interventions provided and reviewing progress every two weeks.



## 2. Identify vulnerable pupils early on

*It's knowing the child and knowing their needs. Gathering intelligence early on gives you the evidence you need to access additional support where it is needed. (Senior Leader)*

*I met with the teachers before my son started in Year 7. We were able to talk about his issues. It was reassuring to know that support was being put into place. (Parent)*

*Time is the golden factor in identifying pupils' needs. (Assistant Headteacher)*

Schools knew that disengagement often started early on in a child's education and it was too late to wait for issues to materialise on transfer to the secondary school.

Well-established programmes of close liaison with partner primary schools enabled secondary schools to identify pupils at risk of disengagement very early - often in Years 4 or 5. Senior staff and pastoral leaders visited the primary schools to meet pupils, creating profiles of children vulnerable to disengagement. One school sent birthday cards to identified children in Years 5 and 6 and planned intensive support on transition for vulnerable pupils and their parents, typically during Year 6 and over the summer holiday prior to transfer. Many of the secondary schools collaborated with large numbers of partner primaries and had found creative ways of addressing this challenge: one school shared members of its governing body with its partner primaries whilst others had formed more formal cross-phase partnerships, clusters and Trusts.

**At The Heath School** in Halton, the Assistant Principal works in very close collaboration with local primary schools to identify vulnerable students prior to transfer. During Year 6, the Assistant Principal and her extensive team from The Centre for Student Intervention (CSI) visit partner primary schools to take 'case histories'. This profiling focuses on those at risk and is also used as a way of identifying those who are at risk of not participating post-16. The case histories take into account social and emotional confidence, family background, family status such as single parents, any possible mental health issues, domestic violence, Looked After Children status, and any specific barriers to learning or special educational needs (SEN) requirements. As a result of these visits, intervention is planned in advance so that no time is wasted on transfer. The progress of identified students is closely monitored by the CSI and additional provision is reviewed every six weeks to decide on either exit or continuation.

**Abbey Hill School** in Stockton-on-Tees is an 11-19 special school that takes pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has established a comprehensive transition programme which ensures staff have a good understanding of the complex physical, emotional and academic needs of their pupils prior to their joining the school in Year 7. One aspect of this involves staff at Abbey Hill working in partnership with their partner primary schools to offer transition 'taster sessions' which include sample sessions of the different subjects pupils will be taking; room hunts; lunch in the canteen and meeting staff. This initiative has significantly improved Year 7 pupils' induction into the school.

At **Little Ilford School** in Newham, a dedicated transition team, led by a primary trained teacher, works in very close collaboration with seven local primary schools to identify vulnerable students before they transfer. From as early as Year 4, pupils are identified for both academic and social or emotional support. This includes those pupils who are working below expectations, at risk of becoming stuck or slow moving or are Gifted and Talented (G&T). Support provided by Little Ilford teachers has focused on supporting writing across the cluster of schools, booster support through English and mathematics workshops, after school G&T clubs and cross curricular support for art and drama activities. The transition team also provides guidance to primary schools on supporting pupils for entry into Year 7, including promoting self reliance and pupil organisation. Little Ilford facilitates a range of focused transition days specifically for vulnerable groups or those with pastoral, learning or behaviour issues. On transfer, the school uses a continuous tracking procedure so that data is used from Year 6 into and across Year 7.

### 3. Facilitate communication between key personnel

*A real strength is the connections we make. Good communication and information sharing allows us to have focused conversations and precise targeting of the support needed to be successful. (Headteacher)*

*We gather everybody who counts and talk about what's working and what isn't. (Head of Learning Support)*

*There is always someone who has the expertise or who will know who you need to speak to. (Learning Manager)*

All of the schools had established strong links with external agencies such as the educational social welfare officer, attendance officer, police, youth workers, local authority support services, CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and TAMS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools) facilities. Multi-agency working was strong, ensuring a joined up approach to harness the knowledge and expertise of all professionals involved in a child's care. Many of the schools had on-site facilities such as a health centre, staffed by specialist professionals including counsellors and a school nurse.

There were designated teams - variously called the 'pastoral and social inclusion team', the 'curriculum access support team', or the 'learning support team' – but their remit was the same: to facilitate effective communication between key personnel in order to enable more effective provision and monitoring of support for pupils who were failing to thrive in their education. Representatives from these teams met regularly – typically on a weekly basis - on achievement boards or inclusion panels; the purpose of these meetings was to monitor and review progress, to discuss individual pupils and to bring any new concerns to the table.

**The Grange School and Sports College** in South Gloucestershire has a Behaviour for Learning (BfL) worker, previously employed as a teacher at the PRU, who works with the school all the year round. Her role is to co-ordinate all external and internal student support. Every two weeks, she chairs Student Support Group meetings at which four or five pupils from each year group are discussed in depth. Actions are agreed by all attending agencies, many of which are immediately implemented.

In addition, the BfL worker works closely with all families, offering a range of emotional and practical support, including, for example, completion of forms to access resources. She visits all identified vulnerable pupils in their homes before they join the school and routinely visits existing pupils who are identified as a cause for concern. She works throughout the school holidays, as the school has learnt that vulnerable pupils are most at risk during these periods. The BfL worker is highly respected by all staff and pupils: pupils regularly both self-refer and refer other pupils.

At **Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls** in the London Borough of Greenwich, the Curriculum Access Support Team (CAST) meets weekly. The meeting is attended by the teacher in charge of Special Educational Needs, the Head of Year, the learning mentor attached to the year group, the attendance officer, the student services manager and any other multi agency workers as appropriate. Each week they focus on a different year group and individual pupil cases are discussed and reviewed. Support is planned and agreed so that all parties know what action is being taken and who is responsible.

Achievement Boards at **Rainhill High School** in St Helen's include all the key people involved in the children's learning and progress. Each year group has an Achievement Board meetings are chaired by the headteacher and include the curriculum deputy, assistant head-teacher, inclusion manager, Head of Year pastoral manager, learning mentor, Heads of English and mathematics and the examinations officer. The group explores emerging issues from data analysis, identifies underperforming departments, groups and individuals, and has a focus on those pupils not on track to achieve GCSEs in both English and mathematics. Issues are identified and potential solutions discussed and agreed. Individual staff are accountable for each element of school performance, for example Pastoral Leader for 100%5AG.

## 4. Secure the foundations for learning

*We have found that if pupils can't access the curriculum, they quickly start to disengage so basic skills are so important. (Principal)*

*Being in the raising achievement class in year 7 helped him a lot. He got a lot of individual intervention and small group help which he needed. (Parent of Year 8 boy)*

*My reading age has improved from 10.4 to 13.2. I have enjoyed the lessons and we visited Blue John Cavern to learn more about the book we were reading. (Year 7 pupil)*

Pupils who started secondary school with an insecure grasp of literacy and numeracy were sometimes susceptible to disengagement later in the key stage. As a result, a number of schools delivered an integrated curriculum based on a primary model in Year 7 with a focus on literacy, numeracy and social skills to cater for pupils who were unlikely to cope with the demands of a secondary timetable. Other schools operated nurture groups which either met weekly or were taught together as a small group. Elsewhere, enrichment groups or raising achievement classes ran throughout Year 7 to provide additional literacy support alongside English lessons. In all cases, the emphasis was on gradual reintegration of pupils into mainstream as soon as they were ready.

In her review of vocational education Professor Alison Wolf stressed the importance of all young people studying English and maths, and particularly achieving A\*-C in GCSE English and maths, as this offers the best employment prospects and opportunities for progression. She recommended that all post-16 study should include English and maths for those who have not achieved GCSE A\*-C in these subjects. The Government accepted all the recommendations of the Wolf Review.

At **Paignton Community College** in Torbay, there are two 'nurture' groups in Year 7, each comprising 15-16 pupils: the 'LAP' group (low achievers' project) and the 'LAN' group (literacy and numeracy). Both groups cater for pupils with low levels of literacy and numeracy, but the LAP group also contains some of the most vulnerable pupils in the cohort. Both groups are taught by one teacher in their own base, a model that is familiar to pupils from their primary school. Pupils from the LAP and LAN groups who need further support are combined into one nurture group in Years 8 and 9. By the end of Year 9, most pupils have been reintegrated into the mainstream or will go on to a special work related programme in Year 10.

At **Castle Rock High School** in Leicestershire, the most vulnerable students in Year 7 are taught in the 'Skills Academy' by specialist teachers. The academy provides for up to 12 students and teaching focuses on literacy, numeracy and building social skills. Social activities are as important as the core subjects so, for example, the pupils cook and eat together once a week and go out on visits. Pupils can stay in the academy for as long as they need to and a flexible approach means that they can reintegrate into some lessons and still receive support in others until they are ready to stay in mainstream full-time.

At **Rainhill High School** in St Helen's, staff have a deep understanding and knowledge of both the academic and social and emotional needs of pupils and are able to ensure that appropriate support is in place when pupils join the school in Year 7. The most vulnerable Year 7 pupils are taught in a nurture pathway group. This group of pupils, working at Level 3 and below when they begin Key Stage 3, are taught the majority of their lessons in a room that is akin to a primary setting by a primary teacher who has expertise in working with pupils with SEN / LDD. Pupils join their peers for practical lessons such as science and design technology. Groupings are flexible with pupils moving out of the group and back into mainstream classes when they are ready.

## 5. Support pupils at key transitions when young people are most vulnerable to disengagement

*We take the young person to the college and stay as long as it takes. For some of them, the transition is too far out of their comfort zone. We put competition aside. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*He was included in everything, but knew there were people there to support him. The transition period for each stage was broken down so it wasn't such a shock. (Parent)*

*It has given me a taster of college and built my confidence. I already know the tutors so I am looking forward to going there full-time. (Pupil)*

Schools understood that pupils at risk of disengagement were particularly vulnerable at key transitional points such as transfer from primary to secondary school or from Key Stage 4 to post-16 provision. Other transitions, such as movement between year groups, between key stages (particularly when a split site meant a change of location) or following a structured intervention, were also on the schools' radar. By anticipating and providing for pupils' potential needs, schools were able to pre-empt problems before they arose.

11-16 schools worked closely with colleagues in local FE colleges to support pupils as they transferred post-16, typically visiting the college with the young person and providing mentoring support until the transition was secure. Whilst year leaders typically moved up through the schools with their cohorts, it was not unusual for heads of Year 7 and 11 to remain in that year to maintain close transitional links with partner organisations.

**At Paignton Community College in Torbay**, Year 6 pupils at risk of disengagement attend courses at the school during the summer term and are supported by 6th form mentors when they join the school in September.. The new academic year begins in July following the school's enrichment week to ensure smoother transition in September. This enables more vulnerable pupils to become familiar with the new school site prior to the start of the new term. The college has also developed the Paignton Employability Pathway (PEP) which provides a stepping stone to FE for some pupils. It is designed to support a small number of more vulnerable pupils as they transfer from Year 11 to post-16, providing appropriate level 2 courses in the sixth form. It has been piloted for the first time this year with 9 pupils from the college and a local special school. The pupils targeted are those that have 3-4 GCSEs at grades D-G who are not yet ready for FE or for full time employment but have the potential to do so with further support.

With around 54 partner primary schools, **Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls** in the London Borough of Greenwich has had to develop some robust systems for primary to secondary transition. Information on incoming Year 7 pupils, particularly those who will need additional support, is gathered in a number of ways. All of the primary schools are asked to complete a form just after Easter and this flags up initial issues and concerns. The local authority holds a cross phase SENCO day for all of its schools at which further information is exchanged between schools. The SENCO is also proactive in arranging meetings with those schools which are outside the borough. In addition, the Head of Year 7 and the Year 7 Learning Mentor visit every feeder school in the summer term. Each new Year 7 pupil attends a taster day and has an interview with their parents, conducted by a member of the senior leadership team. There is a separate taster day for the more vulnerable pupils where they meet

a Year 10 mentor who will be attached to their form group in September. By September a lot of information has been received, enabling the school to plan form groups, inform staff of potential issues and set up early interventions.

**Abbey Hill School** in Stockton-on-Tees found that some of their pupils were becoming disengaged when they transferred to the local college following GCSE success. On further investigation, it seemed that pupils with complex needs missed the essential scaffolding that they required for successful learning. As a result, pupils found it difficult to access their college course work and lost confidence. To ensure that pupils remain engaged and are able to access college courses, staff at the school work proactively with college staff to ensure they are able to build on pupils' prior experiences and provide appropriate bridging support for Abbey Hill pupils to prevent disengagement. This involves flexible arrangements for teaching post-16 pupils. The school is planning to formalise partnership arrangements with the college which further develop flexibility. The school has also been using Engagement Scales to measure student engagement across the key stages and identify students most at risk of disengagement – with the results informing specific programmes which are then put in place, including therapeutic interventions.

**Churchill Community College** in North Tyneside provides a robust and strategic IAG programme for their students from Year 6. The programme includes focus on self-awareness, the raising of aspiration, empowerment and the provision of comprehensive information and advice about career opportunities. The programme also includes 1:1 IAG interview for students from Year 9-Year 13. This intensive educational programme and personalised support contributes to the low numbers of NEET from the school (0 from 2010 Year 11 cohort). Along with another local secondary school, Churchill Community College maintains strong links with the local FE College in order to support more vulnerable Foundation level learners and Level “2.5” learners who require extra support in making transition to Level 3 courses following success at Level 2. This involves early identification of vulnerable students by the secondary schools, supported visits and Taster Sessions to the FE College pre-enrolment and then ongoing mentoring post-transition by the FE College tutors.

*We take the young person to the college and stay as long as it takes. For some of them, the transition is too far out of their comfort zone. (Assistant Headteacher)*



## 6. Keeping pupils engaged with their place of learning

*It gives extra confidence when they apply for college if they already have a few grades under their belt. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*The Student Managers calm you down. They talk to you and help you with your problems. They will try every possible way to help you. You can trust them and tell them anything. (Year 9 pupil)*

*We try to get underneath the disaffection and underachievement by taking the pupil's perspective – what is it like for them? How can we find a way which will work without compromising the student and without appearing unfair to other students? (Headteacher)*

*It could be a quick fix but some youngsters are very vulnerable and we'll be there for the whole journey. It's about getting them fit for life so they won't be NEET. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*We try to link to their interests and then put together a very personalised programme. As soon as they feel more positive about themselves it is so much easier to get them back into lessons. (Student Manager)*

*Many children come to the unit, sometimes just for break and lunchtimes. No matter what they come for, there is no stigma attached. We are very much part of the school and not a separate entity. (Inclusion Manager)*

The schools recognised that pupils' social and emotional needs impacted on their engagement in education if left unaddressed. The schools provided a comprehensive range of bespoke interventions, searching tirelessly to find or create an intervention to address a specific need. Sport (such as football academies and sports leadership programmes) and drama or arts projects were typically harnessed to promote positive behaviours and boost self confidence whilst 'time-out' cards supported pupils to manage their own behaviour at times of stress. Well-executed rewards and incentives programmes were used to motivate pupils and some schools entered Year 9 pupils for qualifications so that they could build on their early achievement. One school had even forged links with a farm where pupils could receive therapy for particularly challenging issues.

One to one mentoring support was given a high priority in many of the schools, with adjustments made to the school day to accommodate mentoring sessions and weekly meetings of mentoring team leads in order to pick up early concerns.

Most of the schools offered alternative provision for pupils who were finding it hard to cope in the mainstream setting. Typically, this provision consisted of on-site inclusion units in comfortable accommodation which pupils could either access on a 'drop in' basis or as part of a full time personalised timetable. As well as a core timetable, structured discussions helped pupils to socialise with adults and peers, to reflect on their behaviours and agree self help strategies. A number of the units had garden areas where pupils could work in an outdoor environment. One-to-one counselling and group sessions on anger management were also typically provided.

**The Grange School and Sports College** in South Gloucestershire runs a mentoring programme called 'Countdown to Success'. Each year, the programme is launched with parents and carers of Year 11 pupils who were identified as at risk of underachievement at the end of Year 10. This individualised mentoring programme can involve more than 60 pupils and 40 staff, some of whom are support staff. Short action plans are completed with each student at the end of each two-weekly session, stating exactly what actions are to be completed by the student and their mentor. A copy of the action plan is then sent to the deputy headteacher in charge of the programme in order to monitor impact.

**Redcar Community College** in Redcar and Cleveland has a learning and behaviour support unit (called SIDS) which provides support which ranges from a breakfast drop-in to a weekly 14-hour programme of support. The unit has its own garden where the pupils grow vegetables and flowers which are sold to the local community. Team working is key as is the quality of one-to-one talk and socialisation within the unit.

*If it wasn't for SIDS, we'd have been sent to another school by now. (Year 9 pupil)*

**Castle Rock High School** in Leicestershire has three student managers who are non-teaching staff with responsibility for the provision for the most vulnerable students. Their roles cover intervention, primary to secondary transition, alternative provision and transition to upper school. Specialist support for behaviour and building self esteem takes place either in one-to-one or small group sessions in 'The Green Room'. Intervention programmes and alternative provision are wide ranging and include a 10-week project with a Leicestershire football academy, a therapeutic horse grooming programme and the development of an outside area with flower beds, vegetable garden, animals and a nature area.

At **The Bolsover School** in Derbyshire, there is an inclusion unit which is staffed by an inclusion manager, the teacher in charge of Special Educational Needs (SENCO), a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) and two part-time staff. Pupils arriving at the school during the school year may spend some time in the inclusion unit before they are integrated into mainstream classes. The unit also provides specialist support, particularly for literacy and for social, emotional and behavioural issues. Pupils' timetables are tailored to provide this additional support when it is needed but they can also visit the unit, sometimes just at break and lunchtimes, to talk to staff or to seek advice on particular issues.

## 7. Promote enterprise and independence

*It is very powerful for the pupils to begin to create their own pathways in Year 7. They can begin to follow their own interests and skills. (Principal)*

*We want the girls to become creative thinkers – the lessons help to develop their verbal skills, leadership skills and teamwork skills. (Principal)*

*It's about developing independence and accessing support from a range of people because that's what life is like – you can't just be supported by just one person- you become dependent. (Assistant Headteacher)*

*The VI form offer will change; students are telling us what they want, for example, jobs that involve teamwork. (Head of Year 8)*

Schools planned regular opportunities for pupils to exercise choice and develop independence throughout Key Stage 3, enabling them to take control of aspects of their education early on. Pupils were typically offered 'taster' sessions in a range of subjects prior to option choices to make sure that they were able to choose wisely. One school even offered enrichment options from Year 7; lessons ran for a term and included archaeology, food science and alternative sports.

Schools place a high priority on skills which have direct relevance to the world of work, typically encompassing personal learning and thinking skills and encompassing everyday skills such as planning, analysing and applying. Several schools collapsed the Year 7 timetable every Friday to enable pupils to work on cross-curricular projects involving teamwork and other transferable skills. Schools saw the impact on pupils as they transferred these skills to new contexts and took greater responsibility for managing events such as sports day or designing and creating sculptures for the school courtyard. Data analysis showed increased attendance on these days.

Outward bound events, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and community projects also instilled a sense of responsibility and purpose.

At **Dinnington Comprehensive School** in Rotherham, a programme called 'Endeavour' is run each year by an external organisation for one day a week with the 23 most vulnerable students in Year 9. The programme is active and focused on outward bound activities; all equipment and clothes are provided by the course organisers to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged or stigmatised by inadequate resources. In advance of the programme, all identified pupils are offered a taster day so that they know exactly what to expect when they embark on the programme in September. Participation in the programme contributes to The Youth Award Scheme and ASDAN qualifications.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum at **Little Ilford School** in Newham is closely linked to developing life skills for work. In Year 7, the school operates the Creative Concept Learning programme which focuses on nine deep and immersive learning projects each year. Each project lasts for 40 hours (10 x 4 weeks) and is delivered in two, three and five-hour chunks. The projects focus on the key concepts students need to learn and how these skills can be transferred to develop lifelong learning skills. The project includes visits to businesses as well as enrichment activities. The changing focus of the curriculum across Key Stage 3 supports students from Year 7 to think about career choices and options. Due to the success of the programme, it is

planned to run a similar scheme in Years 8 and 9 but with a broader skills-based focus on the world of work.

**The Heath School** in Halton works with 58 local businesses to provide bespoke information, advice and guidance (IAG) and life skills at the local business park to students in Years 10 and 11 who were identified as being at risk of not participating post-16. The Education Enrichment & Life Opportunities (EELO) project is designed to provide students with opportunities to experience the workplace, hone interview skills and develop awareness of career opportunities in the local area. Small groups of students work closely with the EELO co-ordinator to match their skills to a job they would like to try. This helps students to identify a future career and prepare a careers action plan which is linked to qualifications and identifies any further help and guidance needed.

At **Redcar Community College** in Redcar and Cleveland, all Year 9 pupils experience an alternative curriculum every Thursday morning for two hours, following a 6-week rolling programme. The focus is on practical skills through enterprise and project management and pupils have been engaged in a range of activities such as cake decorating and glass making. All products are costed and sold.

## 8. Engage parents at every opportunity

*We can't engage pupils without parental engagement. (Headteacher)*

*It wasn't easy to tell the headteacher that I was struggling with my son's behaviour, but the school has done everything to make the situation better. I feel like we are working together. In the last six months, my son has turned himself around. (Parent)*

*If you contact the school there is always a quick response and you get through to the right person straight away. (Parent)*

*I have never given up on my children and that's because of the school's support. (Parent)*

Teachers took every opportunity to engage with parents and carers, seeing them as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Schools were made welcoming and accessible to parents so that they were more likely to share information promptly before a problem could take root. For example, one school offered a 'one stop shop' for parents whilst another had created a focal reception area with a dedicated member of staff available throughout the day. As a result, all parental concerns received a rapid response and parents were more likely to confide in the school if there were issues with their child at home. Furthermore, all decisions regarding interventions were made jointly with parents and carers.

Effective use is made of a Parent Support Adviser at **Abbey Hill School** in Stockton-on-Tees. Shared with two other mainstream schools, the Parent Support Adviser has a key role in enabling the school to both identify and respond to pupils' individual issues more quickly. She has the flexibility to visit parents in their own home which enables the school to reach all parents, including those who are school-phobic. Portable IT equipment enables much of the common assessment framework (CAF) system to be carried out in the pupils' home with all vital paperwork completed and signed by parents during the visits. She provides a 'buffer' for those parents who regard the school as an authoritative entity. Through this way of working, parents feel involved and in control of the process.

**Rainhill High School** in St Helen's has established a 'Think Family' team who work with parents on pathways open evenings to ensure full consultation, break down barriers and actively involve all parties. The school holds 'listening evenings' for targeted cohorts such as the academically more able or pupils with special educational needs to make sure that parents and pupils are kept fully informed and the school is aware of the views of these parents.

At **Dinnington Comprehensive School** in Rotherham, the headteacher and senior leadership team facilitate a range of formal and informal opportunities to meet with parents and carers. Each week, two members of the senior leadership team run drop-in surgeries for an hour after school. Parents and carers can come to the surgery to discuss anything that is concerning them, from issues relating to the overall running of the school to specific worries about their children. In addition, the headteacher and the chair of governors run termly off-site surgeries for parents and carers in order to engage those who are more reticent about attending meetings at the school.

## 9. Signpost the progression routes

*Now I want to stay at college until I'm 19. I can sit and get on in lessons now. The work placement has given me a goal to work towards. I want to learn a range of trades so I can set up my own business in the future. (Pupil)*

*My son's potential has been recognised. He has been pushed and given extension work. He has also been guided to take courses which will keep him interested and lead to his chosen career. His behaviour has transformed. He is a different person. (Parent)*

*Pupils can still study 8 GCSEs if they want to and do a work related learning course. The two go hand in hand. Concentration and motivation in the core subjects have improved as a result. Pupils can put their learning into context. (Senior leader)*

*There has been a dramatic change in my attitude. I am more confident and I know I am making better progress in my subjects. My mentor has helped me to find a Level 2 childcare course which I hope to get on to next year. I have been doing a placement this year at a nursery school for one day a week. (Year 9 pupil)*

Alison Wolf's review of vocational education outlined the importance of high quality work experience placements as part of a coherent and well thought out post-16 study programme.

Schools placed much emphasis on high quality work-related learning (WRL), work placements and apprenticeships. One school employed its sixth form students as ICT technicians and sports supervisors which motivated students to remain in school rather than looking for part-time employment elsewhere. WRL and academic GCSE courses sat side by side and were not seen as mutually exclusive, each providing a meaningful context for the other. Schools forged close links with employers and local industry and one school chose to appoint staff with experience in business and industry.

Schools with sixth form provision ensured that they offered a range of appropriate post-16 provision from entry level to level 3 qualifications and it was not unusual for packages to be tailored to the needs of pupils to enable them to remain in education post-16.

**Rainhill High School** in St Helen's provides appropriate support for pupils identified as being potentially NEET by buying into the Chamber of Commerce's pre-NEET programme. The programme helps pupils to develop interview skills, raises self-esteem and supports pupils in identifying where they would like to be post-16. The Connexions and work-related manager are involved in both short and longer term work placements.

**The Castle Secondary School** in South Gloucestershire runs a Work2Learn re-engagement programme for students at risk of not participating post-16. The programme is run by a coordinator who is not a teacher. He is in school three days a week and works with a group of Year 9 students who have been referred to him by the Student Support Group. Acting as a mentor and role model, he works with each student to design a 'Student Learning Plan' which will inspire and re-motivate the young person in Key Stage 4 and improve their chances of making an effective transition post-16. The learning plan may include mentoring, extended work



experience placements, college courses and esteem-building activities alongside academic GCSEs.

At **Aldercar Community Language College** in Derbyshire, all pupils in Year 9 follow a four-week rotation applied learning taster programme. This includes construction, engineering, electrical, hair and beauty, health and social care, and performing arts programmes. When pupils make their option choices, they choose one of these applied learning courses to study in Key Stage 4 alongside their GCSEs. All of the courses have a clear progression route through to level 3. Many of the courses are taught by staff with backgrounds in business and industry who bring high professional standards and workplace ethics into the classroom. The staff have strong links with business and industry, both locally and further afield, and this has opened up opportunities to pupils for work placements and apprenticeships, as well as raising career aspirations.

From the start of Year 9, pupils at **The Heath School** in Halton can choose a wide variety of subjects to study within a particular pathway. The 'green' pathway has been specifically designed to 'hold in' vulnerable and potential NEET students. It achieves this by providing a learning experience that focuses on behaviour management and appropriate careers guidance to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. Learning support assistants are available in every lesson. As well as taking academic GCSEs, students also take a short vocational course such as the Junior Sports Leader Award or the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. Flexibility in timetabling allows students to take additional GCSEs from other pathways. Students also have the opportunity to take part in three different areas of work experience, with an extended work experience taking place one day a week for students in Year 11. As the aim of this pathway is to ensure that every student has a post-16 college place, students are accompanied by teachers to suitable post-16 interviews.


## D. Conclusions

These conclusions should be seen in the context of the sample size involved in the study.

1. Whilst attainment is the biggest driver of post-16 participation, it is clear that there are approaches that schools can adopt to encourage post-16 participation amongst all pupils, including those with below average attainment.
2. Early identification of disengagement – often as early as Years 4 or 5 – combined with targeted, appropriate provision which addresses pupils' specific and diverse learning needs are vital factors in securing post-16 engagement in education or training. Schools that know their pupils well and know the early signs of disengagement are well placed to address issues before they take root.
3. Schools are committed to securing - even for less academic pupils - success in the basic GCSEs as the firmest foundation for future work, and work hard to keep them on track.
4. Schools that promote enterprise, independence and choice and involve pupils and their parents in key decisions about provision can help them to see education and training as something in which they can engage as active and resilient participants rather than something that happens to them as passive recipients.
5. Well orchestrated and coordinated communication between schools and other providers, external agencies and local businesses can help pupils to understand the relevance of education and the link between academic and work-related learning.
6. For schools that have high aspirations, an inclusive ethos and an expectation that all of their pupils will participate in education or training post-16, RPA forms a logical extension of their work.



## Annex 1: Self-evaluation: identification of priorities

Possible areas for development				
1 – a strong feature of current practice → 4 – an aspect needing significant development	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Use a range of intelligence to ensure that every pupil is well known</b>				
• Using a range of data to build a detailed picture of every child				
• Analysing data to identify groups vulnerable to disengagement				
• Recognising potential NEET indicators and acting on them				
<b>2. Identify vulnerable pupils early on</b>				
• Establishing liaison with partner primary schools, especially when the pupil intake is drawn from a large number of schools				
• Identifying pupils at risk of disengagement early in Key Stage 2				
• Planning appropriate support for pupils prior to transfer				
<b>3. Facilitate communication between key personnel</b>				
• Forging strong links with external agencies				
• Locating specialist support on site where appropriate				
• Ensuring regular and frequent opportunities for key personnel to meet to review pupils' progress				
<b>4. Secure the foundations for learning</b>				
• Providing additional literacy support for those who need it				
• Nurturing pupils who struggle to adjust to a secondary timetable				
• Reintegrating pupils to mainstream as soon as they are ready				
<b>5. Support pupils at key transitions when young people are most vulnerable to disengagement</b>				
• Collaborating with partner organisations to support pupils on transfer				
• Pre-empting and addressing pupils' needs at transitional points throughout the school				
• Supporting pupils at risk of disengagement post-16				
<b>6. Keeping pupils engaged with their place of learning</b>				
• Seeking bespoke support for specific social and emotional needs				
• Providing one-to-one mentoring support				
• Offering inclusive, appropriate provision for pupils who struggle to cope in the mainstream				
<b>7. Promote enterprise and independence</b>				
• Providing guided choices early in Key Stage 3				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploiting cross-curricular links and transferable skills such as teamwork</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning opportunities for pupils to take positions of responsibility</li> </ul>				
<b>8. Engage parents at every opportunity</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing an initial point of contact for all parental enquiries</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Running off-site surgeries for parents who are reticent about coming into school</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring that all decisions about a child's provision are made jointly with parents and pupils</li> </ul>				
<b>9. Signpost the progression routes</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making clear the links between academic and work-related learning</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forging close links with the local community and local business</li> </ul>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering a range of appropriate post-16 provision</li> </ul>				

From the development priorities identified above, which are not adequately covered by your current School Development Plan?

## **Annex 2: Methodology of study and list of schools visited**

### **Visit methodology**

Each school was visited by a member of the DfE Effective Practice Team for half a day during the summer term 2011. A typical visit included the following elements:

- A discussion with the headteacher and senior leader with responsibility for increasing pupil participation post-16
- A discussion with one or two middle leaders
- A discussion with one or two teachers and support staff
- A discussion with about four to six Year 8 or 9 pupils<sup>2</sup>
- A discussion with a parent/ parents of one or more of the pupils interviewed
- An opportunity for feedback and discussion at the end of the visit

Local authority officers also contributed to a number of the visits.

### **Schools visited**

The DfE is grateful to the following schools for their valuable contribution to this study:

Abbey Hill School Technology College, Stockton on Tees

Aldercar Community Language College, Derbyshire

Castle Rock High School, Leicestershire

Churchill Community College, North Tyneside

Dinnington Comprehensive School, Rotherham

Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls, Greenwich

Little Ilford School, Newham

Paignton Community College, Torbay

Rainhill High School, St Helen's

Redcar Community College, Redcar and Cleveland

The Bolsover School, Derbyshire

The Castle Secondary School, South Gloucestershire

The Grange School and Sports College, South Gloucestershire

The Heath School, Halton

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of the visits during the summer term 2011, the first cohort of pupils to benefit from RPA was in Year 9, with the Year 8 cohort the first required to participate in education or training until the age of 18.